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LETTRE MENSUELLE SUR L'ÉVANGÉLISATION

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Brethren in Christ:

During the past two years in which I have served in the Department of Evangelism it has seemed presumptious to me to write much about my work or activities. However since it seems only fitting that some report be given, and that notification also be made of my change of address, I herewith wish to put forth a few lines as to my activities, observations and thoughts which may, I hope and pray, be of some value in the studies which are being conducted, and the work which is being encouraged.

Briefly then as to my own activities. My financial support has come entirely from my morning employment as a school teacher in the lay American Community School. Although it may seem strange this has proved most beneficial for several reasons. First, it has been a joy to dedicate my time to the Church at large while not teaching, completely unhampered by the restrictions of politics, finances, and petty quarrels that are so often the plague of ecclesiastical organizations, especially in large cities. This joy of giving oneself wholeheartedly, independently and unrestrictedly has been a precious experience that has brought endless blessings. Second, in the school itself, although teaching history, language and mathematics, it has been a wonderful experience to act, mostly unknown as a pastor, as spiritual counselor to countless teen-agers with all sorts of spiritual problems which continually face them, as well as the leader of many special occasions with prayers, scripture readings and quotations and discussions of theological, doctrinal, and spiritual questions. The school itself contains children from some thirty different racial and nationalistic backgrounds, and perhaps more religious affiliations - Protestants, Catholics and Jews of various different

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inclinations. History and Civics courses especially lent themselves to the opportunity to aid young people to open their hearts more to the light that comes from the Scriptures and to live in accordance with its teachings.

Apart from the teaching, it was a special privilege to serve preaching in the churches of the Lutheran, Methodist and Scottish Presbyterian Churches in and about Buenos Aires and to conduct devotional groups in summer camps. The different places for preaching ranged from that of a small mission congregation among Slovac refugees in a meat packing plant's settlement to the large and well established English congregations in the center of the city. The preaching in itself was a joy, as it is for every ordained minister, but the greatest joy often came from the visits and contacts with those who, for one reason or another needed counsel, comfort or guidance because of sickness, doubts, worries, family and childrens' problems, estrangement, or unemployment. Real poverty is seldom encountered, or has been seldom encountered for the land is abundant in its providence, but indifference and doubt, and the other above mentioned problems plague the people too often, and hide beneath the surface of what might seem a placid exterior. In contacts with the different pastors it has been also interesting to note the ways in which the various denominations try to cope with this situation. Campaigns of evangelism with special speakers and a systematic visitation programme together with the distribution of various types of literature and Bible portions have often proved of great value. Perhaps however the parochial day school well conducted and affiliated with the National School System has proven more effective than any other instrument of evangelisation because of the formality of social relations in this area. It is difficult to enter a strange house and make one's self welcome when the ruling social opinion is that such an intrusion is a breach of etiquette. The parochial school breaks down these barriers, at the same time bearing testimony of the Word. There is no doubt that "man's need is God's opportunity" and the key to evangelism seems to be to discover those needs and be present to minister to them in Christ's spirit at the time they make themselves most felt. The personal contact at the right moment is thus a bridge for the work of the Spirit.

Apart from the preaching activity it has also been a privilege to teach in the United Lutheran Church Seminary (Facultad Luterana de Teologia in José C. Paz) near Buenos Aires and to teach at several youth study group programmes in and about Buenos Aires as well as to work amply with the Student Christian Movement on various occasions. There is no doubt that the youth of the world sense the uncertainty of the future and the tremendous forces at odds in our world of today and wish to dedicate their lives to the stemming of what seems an onflowing tide towards destruction. Many consecrated young lives and hungry hearts are willing to give themselves to Christ's cause if only the proper channels be opened up to them. It is the contact of life upon life, through friendships and acquaintances that too often if not invariably make or break the possibility of living in the Kingdom. Many times the Church itself aparently seems to close the doors that would allow this contact to take place, this dedication to be given. Restrictions are not flexible enough to allow the unobtrusive to serve, to have their work duly supported and recognized. It is often too the friendships among those in charge which too often seem to exclude and brand initiatives in spite of their efforts, thus impeding their advance and their contribution to the work.

In connection with my contacts with the United Lutheran Church it has also been a privilege to continue working and publishing a LIFE OF CHRIST in Spanish which is specially pointed at clearing up some of the modern or present day

problems and questions so hotly contested by Latin Americans with regards to the new technical advances and critical studies that have seemed to outmode some of the biblical expressions and writings. Also during whatever free moments are left, I have been working on some translations of various books for theological study, youth groups and pastoral exegesis.

Briefly, now, a few observations. It has often seemed that denominational restrictions have hampered the work of people like myself who seek to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly, voluntarily and freely to Christ's cause. Too often people will seek to brand one as having Reformed, Lutheran or other tendencies. Being a pastor of the United Lutheran Church in America and the son of a missionary to India - it is only too evident to me, at least, that any pastor's library is filled with books written by men and scholars of all denominational tendencies - and that each in one way or another often adds light to the central teaching and example of our one Lord. That certain ritualistic differences exist and should be observed is only obvious, that certain theological views of the sacraments must be respected is also of great importance - but that the essential message of Salvation differs greatly among the leading Protestant denominations as such seems nonsense. This narrow attitude works havoc among workers and unchurched alike. It is good to note positive factors in evangelism - but the negative factors must also be noted and avoided. Thanks to the World Council much has been done and is being done in this line. May God bless us all in this. With love and understanding many of these disconcerting factors disappear.

A second observation is like unto the first. Personal jealousies and prejudices within denominations themselves too often exclude workers and members in their efforts. Should these be minimized there is no doubt that the growth of evan elisation would be only too rapid for our wondering eyes. Too often it is those who do most for the cause that are most severely criticized, for it stands to reason they are more prone to make some slight error now and then while those who nonchalantly sit back can easily find fault and play local Church politics to suit their own aggrandizement. This too however is said not in the spirit of criticism but of observation with the hope that it may be a warning of dangers that beset our path in this area.

A third observation is that the work of evangelism here has truly gone forward and offers tremendous and wonderful opportunities to those who wish to put themselves unselfishly to the task. Latin America is an open and often unturned field that needs the seed of the Gospel desperately - too often it is a flock without a pastor.

In some areas it would seem that a sort of rivalry and competition exists between denominations while in others no work at all has been done and needs desperately to be done. There is a great need that supporting organizations give more freedom to their employees and cooperate more extensively with each other especially in the mission field. Greater trust should be placed in workers for faith breeds faith, and doubt, doubt. Confidence in workers strengthens them while distrust and indifference bring them to desperation. The experiences of many workers has proved this fact over and over again. Little jealousies and fears spring from these same distrusts and strivings on the part of those in high posts - especially in the mission churches.

Every field of Christian work in Latin America though, and especially the River Plata area, offers great opportunities, often in districts which have as yet been untouched. During one summer the author formed part of a group of workmen constructing a house. Conversations with the workers revealed complete misconceptions as to the nature and value of religion, if not stark ignorance. Too often our outreach has been too limited. On the other hand the growing efforts for preparing indigenous workers are stimulating and promising. New schools and seminaries are being established. Prayer and sincere cooperation will do much.

May God bless you all in this great work that the World Council is carrying on, and may our prayers unite for the growth of His Kingdom ever.

Sincerely,

(Rev.) EDWARD W. GRAEFE